

Article

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On the Lam: A Critical Analysis of the Similarities between *Sandeep Aur Pinki Faraar* (2021) and *Nayattu* (2021)



Nayattu

Dibakar Banerjee's *Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar* (2021), a crime drama in Hindi, narrates the plight of two individuals whose fate entwines with one another under life-threatening circumstances. Sandy Walia, aka Sandeep, is a confident, unapologetic, self-made woman who saves her bank from collapse. But in return, she becomes a victim of the bank president's conspiracy to kill her. Satinder Dahiya, aka Pinky, is a muscular Haryanvi police constable under suspension who unfortunately becomes a victim of the conspiracy linked with Pinky. The only worthy option left for the two troubled souls is to flee together. What follows next is a tense and thrilling ride through the long-winded roads of Delhi and Pithoragadh, as the characters confront the systematic misogyny and toxic

masculinity, along the way. Whereas, the Malayalam investigative police drama, *Nayattu* (2021), directed by Martin Prakkat, is a gripping tale of survival by three city police officers. Their lives take a drastic turn when they get mutually involved in an accident killing an individual from the minority community. The magnitude of the events gets escalated in an extremely unpredictable and uncontrollable manner. Every character in the film is under stress and everyone is bothered about maintaining the equilibrium in their life either by running away from the law or abiding by its unscrupulous principles. The extreme cynicism of *Nayattu* brings to our mind the futility of fighting injustices and darkness in a corrupt world.

Both these films are thematically connected with the common thread of intersection of class, culture, educational, economic, gender, power play, and urban-rural divides. All these components become a crucial factor governing the lives of the characters inhabiting the milieu of these films. The principal characters are individuals on the run because the political and police mechanisms are twisted and helpless. The system has become a puppet in the hands of people positioned in the upper echelons of power. And most importantly, both these films have subverted the thriller format leaving the viewers thinking that they have watched a relevant social drama and are worthy of critical analysis.

Strong opening moments

There is a popular practice amongst filmmakers to hook the viewers within the first few minutes of screen time or else they won't be able to grab their attention. As cliched as it may sound but such narrative strategies have always been a strategy that most of the filmmakers have assiduously cultivated within the structure. Some filmmakers have done it on the face while others have weaved it subtly. Young men seated in an SUV winding through a road tunnel, in *Sandeep Aur Pinki Faraar*, cook up an imaginary situation to discuss the rectitude of two women based on the cosmetic applied on their lips. The men exhibit their robustness by overtaking one vehicle after the other and passing caustic comments on the passing vehicle. Their Hariyanvi accented conversation is overlapped with the background score at regular intervals. The vehicle comes to a halt at a police checkpoint. No soon do the men respond to the cops in a jovial mood then their stout bodies are riddled with bullets. The opening scene of Banerjee's film is a long take with a duration of almost four minutes and clings on to a narrative strategy inciting subversion.

In the opening of the *Nayattu*, the "Tug of War" is portrayed as a metaphor to show the power struggle between the state and anti-state systems. CPO (Civil Police Officer) Praveen (Kunchako Boban), even though he belongs to the system, competes against the police team for his village club

and wins the match. But eventually, [he] gets punished by higher officials and transferred to another police station, which sets the plot for the entire chain of reactions. Secondly, through that opening scene, it sets the whole premise of the film in a way, where the viewers can find various communities of the system — such as the politicians, who are interested in election campaigning irrespective of the situation, [and the] police team [who] is fighting for their pride, and the common people cheerleading for the team against the police team. So, it's like a forecast of the upcoming events, too. Praveen even helps one of the players from the opponent but is rebuffed by the captain of the other team [1].



Nayattu

Role reversal and morality

According to Greek mythology, Actaeon, a heroic hunter committed the error of getting mesmerized by the eternal beauty of the Greek goddess Artemis, while she was bathing in the woods. Artemis gets incensed by the audacity of the Actaeon and cursed him. Actaeon turned into a stag and his body was ripped apart by his hounds, as the ferocious animals were unable to recognize their master. A similar situation occurs in both the films where the principal characters become prey to the forces of government and organizations that they have been serving for a long period. The moment Sandy realizes that the Swabhimaan scheme is a scam and confronts his scamster boss Parichay (Dinker), she becomes an eyesore for him. Parichay uses his power and connections to eliminate her and Pinky is set up as bait for the execution. But the devious plan fails, innocent lives are lost and both Sandy and Pinky run away to a distant location of Pithoragadh with a plan. Whereas CPO (civil police office) Praveen Michael and Sunitha (Nimisha Sajayan), along with ASI Maniyan (Joju George) inadvertent gets

embroiled in an accident and the trio flees to Munnar as the police department hunts them.

But are these characters on the run unimpeachable individuals who had been mistakenly entangled in a perilous situation? No, they are not. The moment Sandy realizes the swindling nature of the scheme she demands her share of money from Parichay before quitting the company. Had Parichay offered her the money the matter would have been buried and no one would have been killed. But the moment Parichay refuses to pay her the desired amount she threatens to expose him. So, Sandy's intentions were nothing less than manipulative. Pinki on the other hand is a suspended cop who also works as an assassin. Within the first few minutes into *Nayattu*, we observe Maniyan fabricating evidence against a young boy. Though he is compelled to commit such a heinous act owing to the orders from his senior officials, Maniyan is equally culpable as a corrupt official. Hence we can conclude that the misfortune that befalls the characters is the result of their bad Karma. The traits of their characters shaped their destiny. They become victims rather than shapers of events. And whether we should empathize with the adversity of these characters is solely dependent on the viewer's discretion.



Sandeep Aur Pinki Faraar

Diverse shades of secondary characters

The universes of both films are inhabited by a compelling array of secondary characters not only linked to the main storyline but also their choices directly correspond to the plot points of the narrative. Parichay is a conniving, sharp and shrewd businessman whose decision to eliminate Sandy sets

the knock-on effect within the film. Tyagi (Jaideep Ahlawat), the head of a private security firm, masterminds the shootout at the beginning of the film that ends up in a debacle. Pinki and Sandy watch the indiscriminating firing from a distance and decide to drive to a safe location. But Tyagi has to answer his superiors and he is compelled to accomplish his unfinished task. He is a merciless and sharp guy whose presence within the narrative heightens the suspense of the cat and mouse game between him and the duo on the run. As Sandeep and Pinky reach Pithoragarh, a border town to Nepal, the viewers are introduced to a middle-aged convivial couple, (Neena Gupta) and Uncle (Raghubir Yadav), who is the epitome of the lasting legacy of patriarchy in our society. Sandeep and Pinky enjoy their hospitality as paying guests. The marital bonding between Uncle and Aunty has lasted for several years because it is the husband who wears the pant in the family. In one of the scenes, Aunty mentions an incident to her friends at a party when she packed her bags, put on her shoes and walked right out of the house. But when her husband came running after and asked her where will she go leaving the house, Aunty realized that she has nowhere to go and returns to her husband. Her years of dependence on her husband have conditioned her mind to the notion that women who are economically dependent on their husbands should be submissive. When she asks Sandeep to serve the food to the male members of the house before commencing their meal proves that the seed of patriarchy has been deeply rooted in Aunty's psyche. The character of Aunty stands as a sharp contrast to the character of Sandeep who is a sharp, intelligent and independent woman. At times Sandeep's acumen takes precedence over the choices made by the male characters of the film. The vilest of all the characters in the film is that of the Bank Manager (Sukant Goel), who is a wolf in sheep's clothing. His revulsive attempt to force himself upon Sandeep results in a drastic accident that diverts the narrative in another direction.

In contrast, the universe of *Nayattu* is inhabited by secondary characters whose decisions set off a ripple of ramifications affecting the lives of

the three police officers. The accidental death of Jayan results in a threatening situation for the trio, Maniyan, Praveen, and Sunitha, as Biju and others from the Dalit community create ruckus demanding justice. As the three defenseless police officers go on hiding, the incumbent chief minister is under pressure because of reasons related to electoral politics where the support from a Dalit organization is pivotal to continue his next tenure. He even allows the Police to stage a mock arrest to pacify the agitated citizens as well as feeding the needs of a news-hungry media. But the situation pans out of his control and three police officers had to bear the burnt.

An unconventional resolution

As both the films reach the climax the final moments of the narrative's overarching conflict do not end up fulfilling the general expectations of the viewers. Pinky cross-dresses and becomes a part of the guests from the bridegroom's side, and escapes to Nepal, deceiving Tyagi. Sandeep surrenders herself to the local police, discloses the scam of her bank and serves a sentence. On the other hand, Maniyan has committed suicide with a dying declaration recorded on his mobile phone. Praveen and Sunitha are taken into custody by the police and sent to the court for the verdict. The endings of the film are devoid of a conventional showdown between the protagonist and antagonists of the story. The primary characters resign to their fate and accept the outcomes of their decisions. Even energetic exchanges in the form of romantic chemistry between lead characters are absent from the narrative framework of both films. The desire of the characters to be sexually attracted to one another is not the kind of subplot that whets the interest of the filmmaker of either of the films. Rather the characters are connected based on attractions prompted by their emotional capacity, attitude, beliefs, and shared experiences. Pinky looks after Sandy and cleans her wounds from the miscarriage. He even helps her to overcome the transient phase of

her post-traumatic shock. As a tender gesture of affection Praveen buys Sunitha a packet of sanitary pads. Both these scenes display effective and subtle handling of situations where individuals are caught in trying and difficult times.



Sandeep Aur Pinki Faraar

Most of the popular films made in India aim at keeping the cash counters ringing at the box office. Song-and-dance sequences, exquisite visual strategy, exotic locations as well as several other aspects have been key features of the vocabulary of such filmmaking practices. Over the vast period of churning out these conventional and patterned works, one after the other has also enabled the viewers to acquire a taste for this pan-Indian phenomenon. So under such an atmosphere films like *Sandeep Aur Pinki Faraar* and *Nayattu* helps the world of popular cinema to shed the label of being over-the-top, unrealistic, and melodramatic to a certain extent. The fate of the two films at the box office did not have a long-running showing due to the ongoing pandemic. But if the situation were normal, it would have an interesting observation in determining the number of viewers, who put up too much of a fuss about the quality and aesthetics of the genre in popular cinema, heading to the theatres. *Sandeep Aur Pinki Faraar* is streaming on Prime Video and *Nayattu* is streaming on Netflix.

[1] <https://vaguevisages.com/2021/06/29/interview-with-nayattu-screenwriter-shahi-kabir/>